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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the legal, political, and educational changes in former East Germany as the nation has become reunified, and considers the implications of reunification for institutional research at East German universities. After a brief sketch of legal, geographic, and demographic highlights, the decrepit conditions of East German university buildings are noted. The paper then offers observations of East Germans streaming across the border when it was first opened in November 1989. The educational experience of a typical East German student is reviewed, noting that a file was kept documenting the student's political attitudes to ensure the power of the Communist Party bureaucracy in determining the student's access to higher education. Problems that institutions of higher education now face are noted, including identifying whom to fire, what to do with educators trained to teach Marxism-Leninism and the Communist infused humanities, social sciences, and especially, economics and jurisprudence. Efforts by the West to help East German universities are mentioned. (DB)

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Changes in Institutional Research in Germany

1. The legal background of reunification.
2. Facts and figures.
3. The outside appearance of East German Universities.
4. A digression to the iron curtain.
5. The inner life of people.
6. Students' and professors' careers.
7. Problems of unification.
8. A look back at history.

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This paper was presented at the Thirty-First Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research held at The Westin St. Francis, San Francisco, California, May 26-29, 1991. This paper was reviewed by the AIR Forum Publications Committee and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC Collection of Forum Papers.

Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

On October 3, 1990 Germany was reunified. This was the day when the German Democratic Republic came to an end as a subject of international law. Five new states became part of the Federal Republic of Germany which consists of sixteen states now, including Berlin (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

1. The German constitution from 1949 (Grundgesetz) was operative only for the ten states of the Federal Republic, with modifications also for Berlin, but had made preparations in case that "other parts of Germany would join it" (Art. 23). To be brief I confine myself to the comment that a joining agreement (Einigungsvertrag) between the government of the Federal Republic and an interim government of the GDR had been concluded in order to lay down the transition from socialist law, which means dictatorship of the communist party (SED), to a state under the rule of law. The joining agreement also contains legal requirements concerning universities and other institutions of higher education. The decree follows generally the West-German frame work of law, which is being filled out by the new states. So far the legal background. We will have to go into some details later.

2. Some facts and figures shall give an impression of the situation. A look at the map shows that Germany now is the size of perhaps Montana or New Mexico but has nearly eight million inhabitants (Fig. 2). West-Germany is supplied with about 250 institutions of higher education. One and a half million young people are studying there and 232,500 people are employed.

Fig. 2

East Germany has about 55 institutions of higher education. The ratio of students to employees is 130.500 to 105.300. So far the differences between East and West do not seem to be very remarkable. Only a more accurate comparison of the figures gives a clue about system-immanent purpose (Fig. 3). The institutions East are much smaller than those West. The ratio of faculty to students shows an impressive "care" for students. Back to that later.

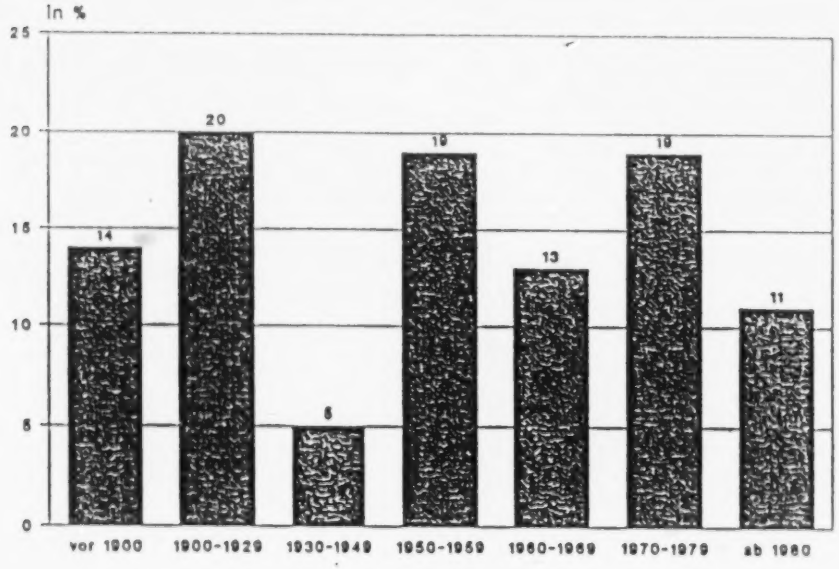
Fig. 3

German Universities							
	West	↓ Ratio ↓		East	↓ Ratio ↓		Ratio ←
Universities	250	Ø 6000		55	Ø 2372		4,55 : 1
Students	1.500.000	4,3	18,1	130.500	1,2	3,6	11,5 : 1
Employees	232.500	1	——	105.300	1	——	2,2 : 1
faculty	82.650	1	1	36.640	1	1	2,3 : 1
staff	149.850	1,8		68,660	1,9		2,2 : 1

3. It would be an understatement to call the outward appearance of the East German universities a disgrace. Buildings, equipment, labs, computers and libraries are in the worst condition one can imagine (coming from the West). On the average 40% of the buildings had been in use before World War II (Fig. 4). From the walls of those set up in the last forty years the plaster crumbles away after the first heavy frost, from some after sunshine. Few buildings are supplied with district heating. Most of them burn brown coal in decrepit boilers. So, an institution with 6,000 students needs about forty boilermen who first shovel the coal into the cellar and then into the boilers. Conveyor belts were too expensive, not to speak of investments for oil or gas heating. I also would just like to mention the pollution of this kind of energy production.

Age of Buildings

Fig. 4



Most of the equipment was modern ten to twenty years ago. The crudeness of working conditions for modern science is indescribable. The supplying of libraries has been determined for forty years by ideological criteria only. Only historians will find a valuable stock of books in some of the very old universities.

In a word, the material requirements for drawing the universities and academies out of the mud will cost billions of Marks. But I think that is no matter to bewail about although German citizens will feel a tax increase, some more, some less, some sooner, some later. The hardest and most painful legacy of forty-five years of communism is situated in the heads, hearts, and souls of the people. They are not prepared for the freedom which they longed for all those years behind the Wall in Berlin and barbed wire along the 1,200 kilometer border.

4. Before I examine what this means for the universities in general and for students and faculty staff in particular, let me report what was happening when the Wall fell. I was an eyewitness to the moment when the people from Eastern Germany were allowed to pass the ten main checkpoints which used to be the only legal - although restricted - passages through the iron curtain between the two Germanys. It was Friday, November 9, 1989. The checkpoint I happened to be present at is situated in a small and drowsy village - some hundred inhabitants - where nothing happens at all. There are two stores for food and beverages, one for shoes, one for household utensils, one bakery and three inns (rather saloon-like). The life there is not known for being very diversified or eventful.

   On the weekend I'm telling about everything was different. Thousands overflooded the sleepy village with old, very old cars, each filled by families, mostly young people with kids and without. They overcrowded the streets in a circle of 50 kilometres and cleared all stores within about four to five hours, bought all items they could afford and get hold of, even the shelf-warmers. But the favorites were bananas, oranges and peanuts which had been offered in the GDR perhaps once a year in rather modest quantities. Small wonder that people just rushed for these fruits which we take for granted.

   The stores were empty, but during the night (Saturday to Sunday) big trucks came from Kassel, and the shelves were filled again. One truck came early Sunday morning, stopped in the middle of the village, opened its loading hatch, and in no time a cluster of people, hundreds, encircled the truck; the cargo: citrus fruits, bananas and peanuts. Tons were sold out by noon. I would not have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. All this was a logistical performance, possible, I think, only in a free enterprise economy.

   Other observations were even more impressive to me. I mean the patience and discipline of the people, on the one hand, and their joy in having won freedom, on the other. They really behaved as if they were just let out of prison because of error of judgement after forty years. No matter that most of them not had been born forty years ago. They honked their horns, waved scarves, rags and pennants, they laughed and weeped at the same time crossing a border where the attempt of crossing would have been death warrant a day before.

5. This was the situation 1 1/2 years ago. Meanwhile the euphoria in East and West has faded away. Soberness and rationality have replaced it. The demands made on federal and state governments, on all kinds of public administrations and on business enterprises, are hardly to be met, because there is no appropriate authority in the new states. The whole public, and also to a far extent private life, was dominated by the communist party and their hangmen. The national security service lay on the country like pack-ice, and the feeling of the people still is as if a snoop was lurking behind every corner. Mistrust was systematically sown among the population. How could dignified human life or science and research thrive under those conditions? In addition to that the planned economy also included the educational system, and that means a gigantic bureaucracy.

6. It would be far beyond our scope to show all aspects and consequences of this, even limited to universities. Thus the careers of students and professors may serve as examples of the whole.

When a girl or boy came to the kindergarten aged three or four - and they had to go because their mothers were obliged, nearly committed to work - a file was started. This file accompanied the children all their lives. It was filled with regularly recurring assessments and references, recording attitude and views concerning the socialist society, actions and commitment toward the "Socialist Fatherland" and, - at school -, marks, grades and performance. If the party found state of mind, basic convictions and fundamental attitudes to be all right, advancement was certain. If one wanted to make sure of advancement, he or she had to at least pretend to be a convinced and busy socialist or communist.

The girl grew up, had the right convictions for passing high school, and wanted to become a teacher. So she had to send an application to the "director of education and instruction" of the university of her choice, but via the director of her high-school. If a boy was intelligent enough to pass high school and to study afterwards, but was not quite reliable and trustworthy in the terms of the party, he could make access to university easier for himself doing one more year military service on a "voluntary" basis.

Now the planning bureaucracy came on the scene. Access to higher education institutes was centrally planned by the minister of education in East-Berlin for a period of five years. The plan provided the number of students for each school and each study-program, the number of places in dormitories and the allocation of money for details beginning with investments, including the chalk for boards. This plan was based on another one concerning the needs of work stations in the entire country, including municipal public services, industry and trade as well as schools and universities and - not to forget -, the communist party, national and international secret service and the armed forces.

The applications of the students were checked by an admissions commission appointed by the rector of the university. Now you understand that the criteria for selection were not only socialist conviction, performance, gifts and skills but also, and not least, fulfilling the plan. Thus it could happen that the girl who applied for the teacher-program in Leipzig was said to better become a biologist, because there was space for this subject in Leipzig, or to apply again next year, or to join the teacher program in Berlin, or to abstain from studying anyway. If a student was admitted to a program, he or she was never able to change subject or university, because this would have mixed up the plan.

Above I mentioned the average small size of universities and the good ratio students to faculty. This is favorable looked at from a didactic point of view, but the communist party's view was different; it just wanted to have each student under control. The system was perfect.

There were only few niches in the GDR to escape ideological pressure since medics, engineers and natural scientists are needed also in a socialist society and because it is in the nature of things that these fields can't be twisted too much for ideological aims. Another refuge were the two churches. No wonder that many politicians on federal, state or municipal level today come from this group.

To become a scientist one followed similar rules as described for students. The central plan also provided for their number. Only 10% of research capacity was located in universities. 90% was united or concentrated in the National Academy of Science or in special institutes. The successful career of a professor inside or outside the university depended in general on membership in the SED.

7. For time reasons I confine myself to these remarks. Now it is necessary to spend some minutes with the problems institutional research in a united Germany encounters under these circumstances. A general problem, the most serious and difficult one, has to be emphasized, and that is, how to compensate and redress forty-five years of despotism and the arbitrariness of a random-state by means of a state under the rule of law. Which persons have to be and can be fired? Who is to be rehabilitated or just vindicated and how can this be managed? Who is entitled to damages and how can rights be restored? I said before that, there are no authorities, no courts, no civil servants, and no judges to answer charges, and the law is in transition, producing more uncertainty than hope at the moment.

There are about 68,000 employees in the universities who have grown up and been educated in this system. Who in the administrative staff and who in the faculty is guiltless? We can forget the boilermen, but not the drivers and the operators. And even the cleaning lady might have been an informer searching for incriminating evidence in the bins. The director of admissions, the director of budget, the director of personnel have to be fired because their jobs were necessarily involved with more or less direct orders of the party. It's the same with the executive faculty like deans and other heads of departments or institutes. But in many individual cases you often find it impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff. As you see again the socialist system has ruined, corrupted and depraved the whole society and at least two or three generations.

But not only the people are ruined. Also the content and quality of higher education suffered heavily from the ideological alignment. At universities many departments have to be closed, programs have to be finished and subjects have to be abolished. We have to differentiate between humanities and liberal arts, on the one hand, and sciences and medicine, on the other. As I mentioned before, sciences or engineering and medicine belonged to the niches where people tried to evade unreasonable demands in order not to become embroiled in political affairs which would be incompatible with their conscience. Young to middle-aged scientists and even more their students will be able to catch up on modern standards of their subjects by getting new equipment, labs, etc. The teaching staff will soon reach the break-even point by further education in communicating and exchanging ideas with their colleagues in West-German universities. They do not have to start from scratch.

That's very different with humanities and liberal arts. First of all there was the basic course in "Marxism - Leninism", obligatory for all students, whatever their subject was. This course was abolished immediately, but what to do with thousands of chairs and staff dedicated to this subject? At one university I heard the professors solved the problem themselves very easily: they screwed off the sign "Department for Marxism - Leninism" which was replaced by another one saying "Department for economics". This camouflage didn't last long, of course.

In the centre of attention are the revival of jurisprudence and economics. Since the federal constitution and most of federal laws came into force in the eastern states it is obvious that the whole system has to be changed totally. The knowledge of lawyers and economists in the former GDR is worth nothing. Schools of law or business administration and all programs offered there can't be continued. Adaption is impossible. Here we have to start right from scratch. And this is a race against time.

It gave me great satisfaction to hear from the professors of my university that they realized suddenly what happens when there is no administration, no management, no executive. In administration lawyers and economists dominate, and thus the higher education system has to produce them.

At the moment there is but one way to help East-German universities, that is support from the West, solid help from professors, civil servants and administrators. The incentives to go East are not very great, as you can imagine, thinking of the housing and school situation only. Readiness to make sacrifices is limited. But the sense of being brothers and sisters in misfortune, if I may say so, exists also in West-Germany.

Every effort has been made since last year to help the universities get back on their feet. The federal government started a financial program. The states in West-Germany divided up responsibilities as "goodfather" for the East-German states. They initiated educational programs for training administrative personnel. The German Association of University Administrators did the same. The German Academic Exchange Service provided scholarships for visiting professors and lectures. Many schools, namely such as law and business administration, organized so-called "flying faculties", that is a group of faculty, who teach at their home-university and in East Germany in the same semester. In addition, a lot of professors from West Germany are teaching in East-German universities by individual engagement some without, but most for payment.

8. I can only touch the surface of the problems, and I hope we will go into some details in the following discussion. Let me end with a look at history. When Columbus discovered America, some German universities already had a famous reputation in Europe. I will just mention Heidelberg (1386), Cologne (1388), Freiburg (1457) and Tübingen (1477), situated in West-Germany and having unbroken traditions until today. Also in East-Germany there were universities founded in the fifteenth century such as Leipzig (1409), Rostock (1419) or Greifswald (1456) (Fig. 5). The youngest, but most famous university among the old ones is the Humboldt-University in (East)-Berlin (1810). Besides Wilhelm v. Humboldt names like Friedrich Hegel, Ferdinand Sauerbruch, Max Planck and Albert Einstein established world fame. Also Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels studied in Berlin. Goethe and Schiller visited the university in Jena (1558), where Marx did his PhD. Many more illustrious names of poets, politicians, scientists could be listed to bear witness to great times of education and science in Germany. Sad and outraged, we Germans look at the devastation forty years socialism have caused. It will take us at least two generations to eliminate all tracks and traces.

Fig. 5